

## 2. LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

### 2-1 Location

Fort Richardson is located in southcentral Alaska, approximately seven miles northeast of downtown Anchorage. At 149° 40' west longitude and 61° 15' north latitude, Fort Richardson is situated between two prominent natural features—the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet to the north and the Chugach Mountains to the east (Figure 2-1).

### 2-2 Satellite Posts

While Fort Richardson serves as the headquarters of USA-RAK, the majority of USA-RAK combat forces are located at Fort Wainwright, a satellite post located in Alaska's interior. Another interior Alaskan satellite post, Fort Greely, is undergoing drastic personnel reductions through the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. The Fort Richardson, Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely natural resources programs are under the technical direction of USARAK's Natural Resources Branch located at Fort Richardson, hereafter referred to as Natural Resources Branch or

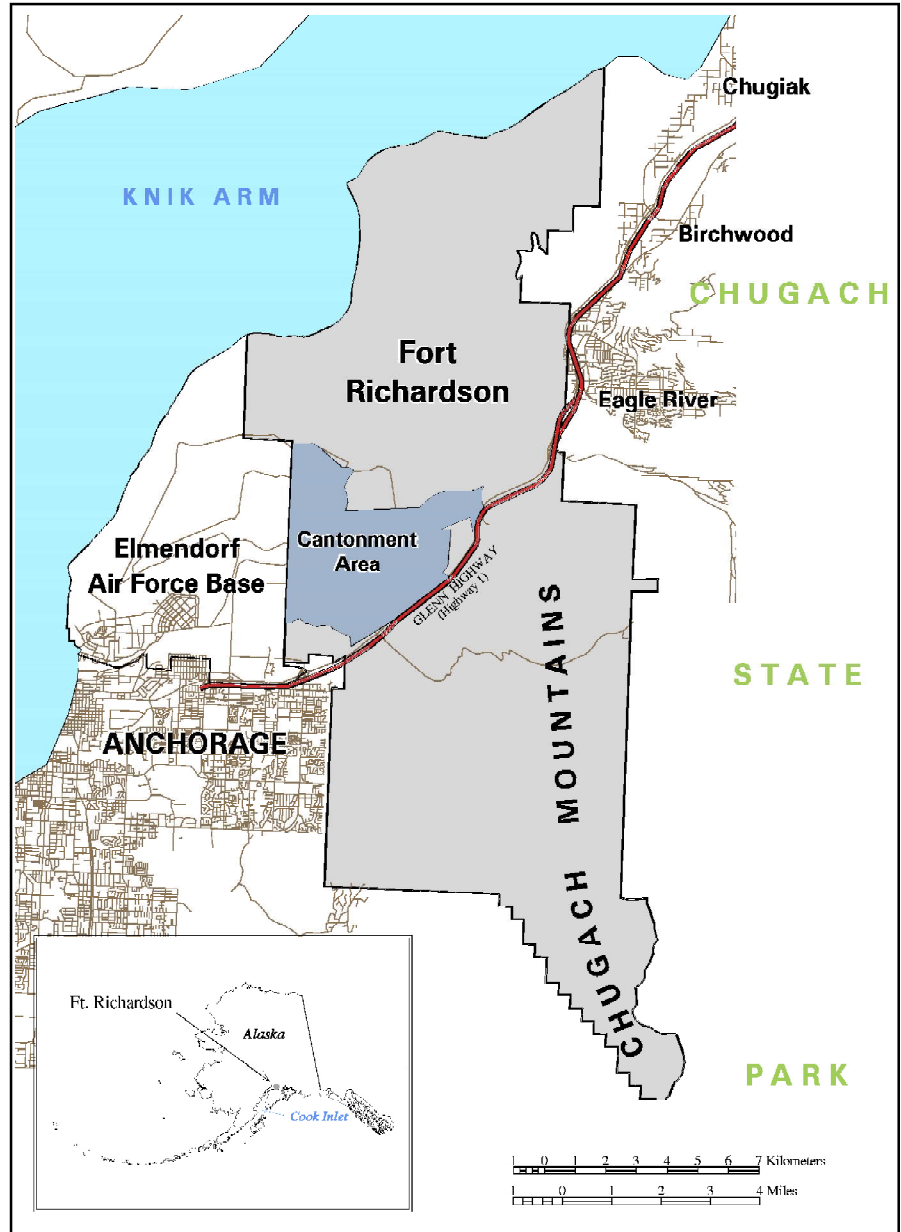


Figure 2-1. Location of Fort Richardson and surrounding communities and land marks.

USARAK Natural Resources. Both satellite installations are developing separate INRMPs (Volumes I and III of this three-volume set of INRMPs).

## 2-3 Neighbors

*From the very beginning, the people of Alaska have welcomed and supported the military in their state.<sup>4</sup>*



*Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base.*

Fort Richardson borders a number of developed areas, with Anchorage and Elmendorf Air Force Base (AFB) to the west and the communities of Eagle River, Chugiak, and Birchwood to the northeast (Figure 2-1). The population of Anchorage exceeds 250,000, which is over 40 percent of the state population (1995 census data), and continues to grow. Expansion of the city is greatly restricted by Fort Richardson and Elmendorf AFB to the east and north, Knik Arm to the west, Turnagain Arm to the south, and Chugach State Park to the south and east. The 13,215-acre Elmendorf AFB base shares many of Fort Richardson's natural features but is more developed. The town of Eagle River, located along Highway 1 (the Glenn Highway), is a suburb of Anchorage.

Chugach State Park, the post's largest neighbor, lies along Fort Richardson's eastern and southern border. It encompasses approximately one half million acres and is one of the largest state parks in the nation. It provides the public with recreational wilderness experiences, such as mountaineering, hiking, fishing, hunting, skiing, and camping.

## 2-4 Acreage and Jurisdictional History

Fort Richardson encompasses approximately 61,000 acres. Due to federal government domination of most land in Alaska in the 1940s and the small population of Anchorage at that time (less than 10,000), land acquisition for military purposes was relatively uncomplicated. Most public domain land was acquired for military use by Executive and Public Land Orders. Several small parcels of private land, e.g., homesites and homesteads, were purchased outright by the Army and are owned as fee simple.

In 1939, an Executive Order (EO) was issued that withdrew 36,570 acres of land from the public domain placing it under War Department jurisdiction. This land, along with small fee-based (private land) acquisitions, subsequent EOs, Public Land Orders (PLO), make up the predominant land base of Fort Richardson today. A time line and explanation of the numerous EOs and PLOs can be found in Appendix 2-4. Figure 2-4a shows the status of lands on Fort Richardson in terms of those owned by the Army and those withdrawn. Figure 2-4b shows the lands that once were a part of Fort Richardson.

Between 1939 to 1945, approximately 151,180 acres of land were withdrawn for military use. Fort Richardson originally resided on land that Elmendorf AFB currently occupies. In 1950, Fort Richardson was moved east to its current location, and 9,042 acres were transferred to the Air Force, which later became Elmendorf AFB.

From 1945 to 1955, the military returned approximately 85,000 acres to the Department of the Interior. Many EOs stipulated the return of these lands following the end of World War II. A letter from the Secretary of the Interior, dated Oct. 27, 1952, granted permission for the military to retain jurisdiction over withdrawn lands until they were not needed for military use. From 1955 to 1965, the Department of the Army released approximately 10,000 acres to various entities such as the U.S. Air Force, State of Alaska, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and acquired approximately 6,000 for Army use. From 1966 to the present, Fort Richardson's

<sup>4</sup> Lt. Gen. L.E. Boese, Commander, Alaskan Commander in *Forces for Freedom*, *Anchorage Daily News*, May 14, 1995.

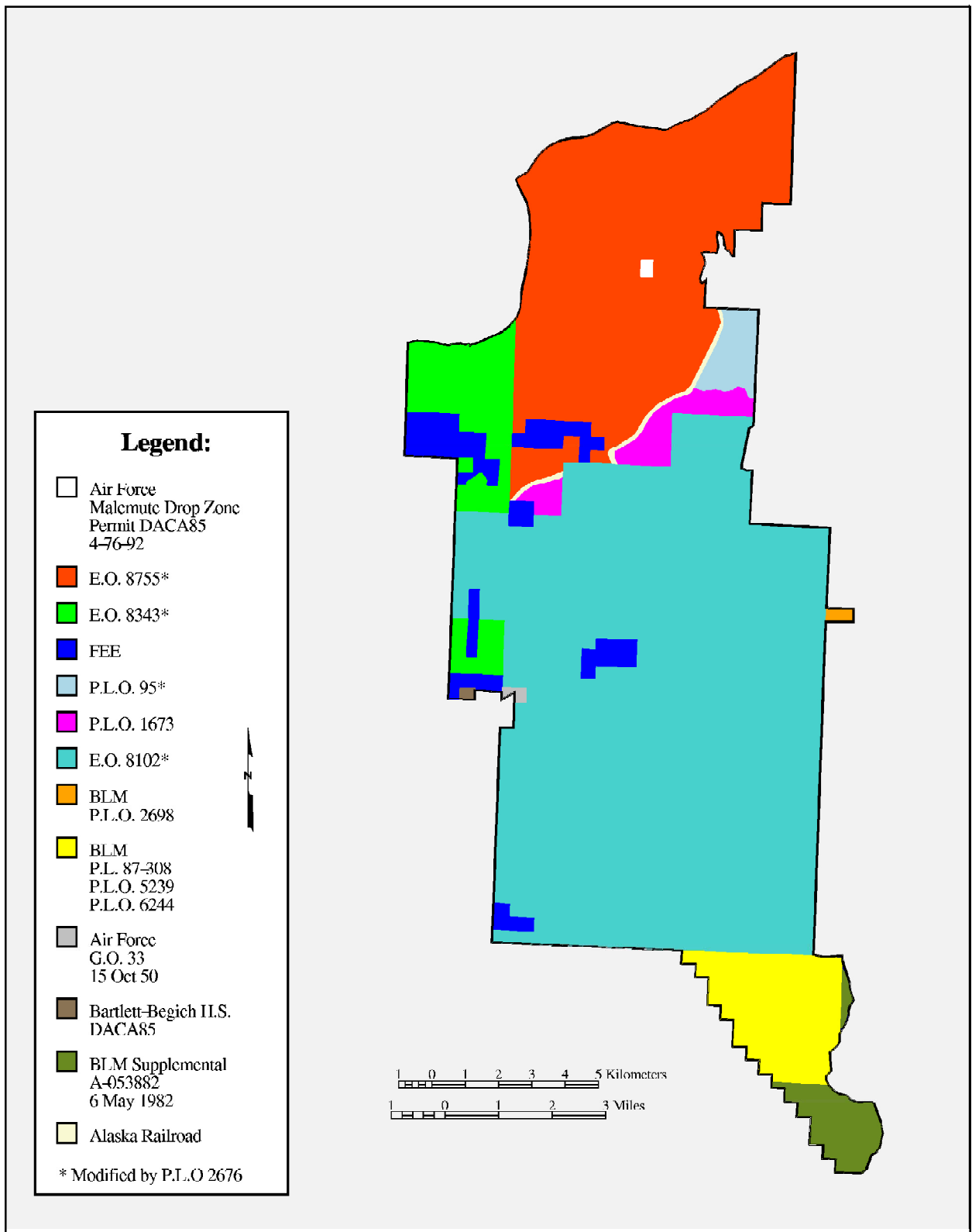


Figure 2-4a. Land Status and Ownership of Fort Richardson.

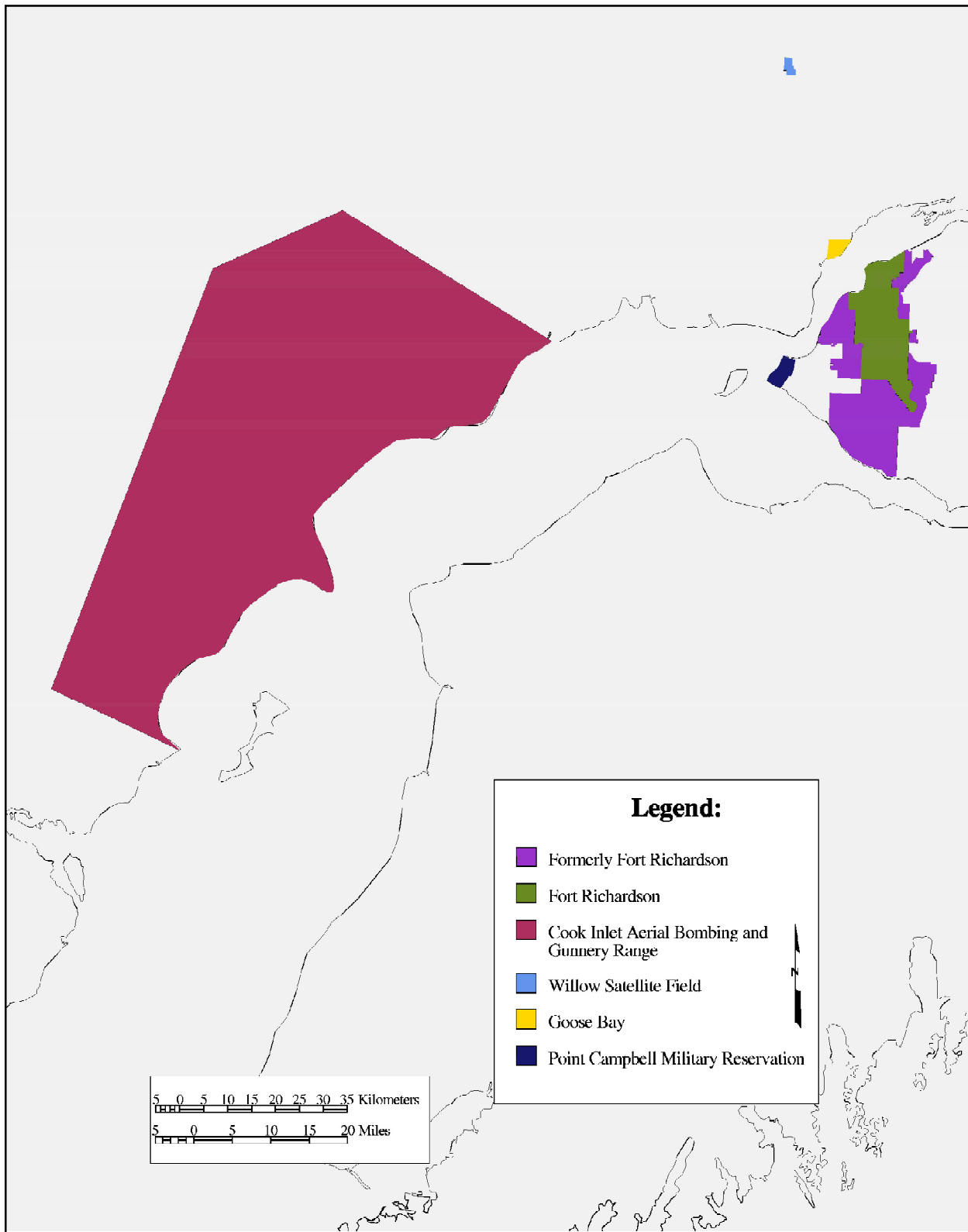


Figure 2-4b. Lands formerly a part of Fort Richardson.

boundaries have remained fairly stable. Leases from the BLM have expanded the boundary to the east and in the south.

## 2-5 Military History

*“If we would provide an adequate defense for the United States, we must have . . . Alaska to dominate the North Pacific.”*<sup>5</sup>

With these words William Henry Seward argued with Congress for the purchase of Alaska. Seward, secretary of State under Presidents Lincoln and Johnson, favored the purchase and was successful in his arguments.

Russia was willing to sell; ninety days after the United States received the offer, the treaty was accepted (June 30, 1867).

Alaska was proclaimed by President Johnson to be the nation’s newest territory, 586,400 square miles, at a total cost of \$7,200,000.

Secretary of War Edward M. Stanton and Major General Henry W. Halleck, commander of the Military Division of the Pacific, proposed that troops arrive at their new stations no later than July to prepare for what would obviously be a demoralizing winter. Troops were not immediately available, however, and the occupation did not take place until October 18, 1867.

The new Military District of Alaska was to be directly responsible to the Military District of the Pacific, but Brevet Major General Jefferson C. Davis was notified that the isolation of his command would call for his nearly complete jurisdiction and decisive action.

At 11 am on October 18, 1867, the USS Ossipee steamed into Sitka Harbor carrying General Davis, his staff, and artillery. General Davis and Prince Maksoutoff, Russian governor of the territory, met and agreed that the ceremony for transferring the land would take place on that cloudy but pleasant afternoon at 3:30 pm at the governor’s house. At 3 pm the Russian Company, under command of Captain Hebrousky, assembled in front of the governor’s house to the right of the flagstaff. The United States troops disembarked from the transports, and as soon

as the soldiers were landed, General Davis, with the guard of honor, proceeded to the governor’s house, taking positions to the left in front of the flagstaff. As the main body of two hundred American soldiers filed past, the Russian troops presented arms. The Americans returned the salute and took their positions to the left of the Russians. At 3:30 pm Prince Maksoutoff and the commissioners appeared. Taking their position near the flag, they were saluted by the military. Captain Pestchouroff gave the signal to lower the Russian flag, at which time the troops were brought to present arms. As the flag was being lowered, the Americans fired the first round of a twenty-one gun salute. A moment later this shot was answered by the first round fired from the Russian battery. The guns fired alternately until twenty-one rounds were fired by each. At the completion of the salute, Captain Pestchouroff turned to General Rousseau and said, “By the authority of his majesty, the Emperor of all Russians, I transfer to you, the agent of the United States, all territory and dominion now possessed by his majesty on the continent of America and in the adjacent islands, according to a treaty made between these two powers.”

General Rousseau accepted, and the flag was placed upon the staff. George Rousseau, the 15-year-old son of the General, raised the Stars and Stripes over the heads of representatives of the two mighty nations. A Russian battery blasted a salute, and it was answered by the thunder of one of the U.S. ships. Again they fired alternately until they had completed the National Salute.

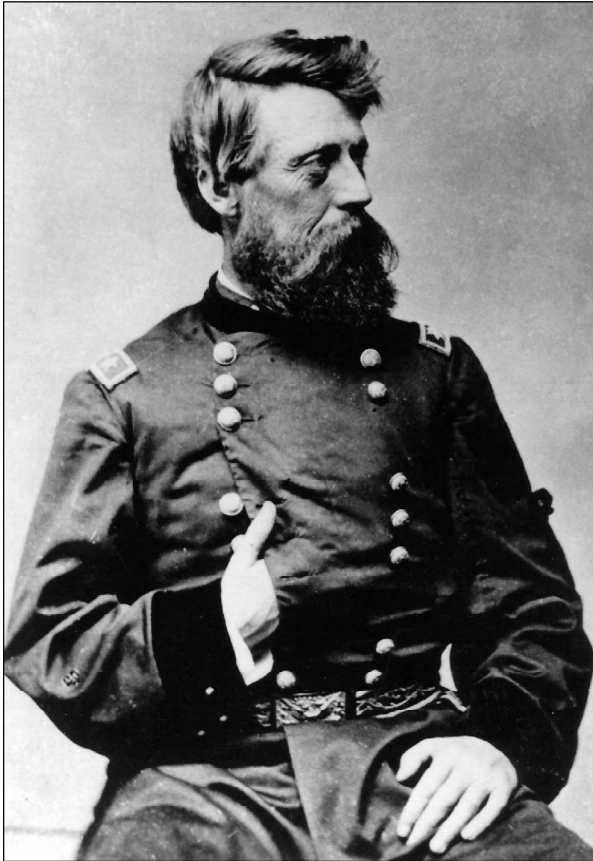
The events that followed that winter, and in the years before the turn of the century, formed much of the proud tradition of the Army in Alaska.

Brevet Major General Jefferson C. Davis and his command were immediately faced with the tasks of not only administering the government but of learning to survive the cruel Alaskan winter.

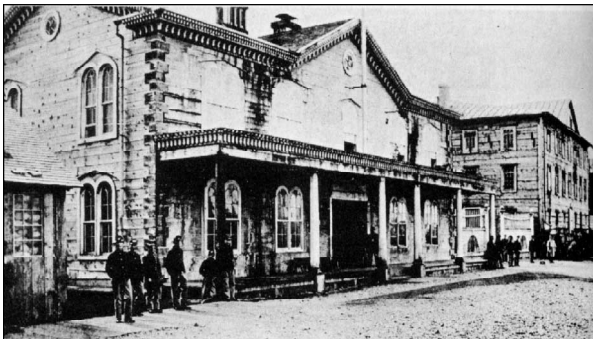
On October 29, 1867 General Davis assumed command of the Military District of Alaska with headquarters at New Archangel (now Sitka) and announced the jurisdiction of the United States over the great territory.

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<sup>5</sup> The majority of historical information found within this section was obtained from *Alaska Centennial* (Roberts, 1967).



*Major General Jefferson C. Davis.*



*General Davis' headquarters and Company headquarters, Sitka, Alaska, about 1868.*

In the spring, the Department of Alaska became the District of Alaska under the Military Division of the Pacific with five posts to be established. Among the post sites selected were Fort Kodiak and Fort Kenai (Kenai) on Cook Inlet.

Since the government had not yet organized civil authority in the territory, it became the duty of the military authorities to give protection to the inhabitants and their property.

Military authority in this area was intelligently withdrawn according to plan as the villages in southeastern Alaska developed. On July 1, 1870, the Department of Alaska was discontinued and the territory was attached to the Department of the Columbia. General Davis and his staff returned to the states.

The army continued jurisdiction in Alaska until 1877 when all troops were withdrawn and responsibility for the territory passed into the hands of the Treasury Department, which had special interests in the commerce of fur and fisheries.

Although Army troops were withdrawn from the territory, the Army did not lose its interest in this vast region of the North. The Signal Corps was operating weather stations as early as 1876, and exploration parties criss-crossed the land.

In 1881, First Lieutenant Patrick Henry Ray and nine men reached Point Barrow, and from this base, explorations were made inland to points never before reached by civilized man. General Greely, then a young lieutenant, came to Alaska in 1882 to direct an Arctic exploring expedition in the territory that was still often referred to as "Seward's Folly." In 1883, a military party was charged with making a reconnaissance from Chilkoot Inlet to Fort Sekirk on the Yukon River. This party traveled the entire length of that great river in a trip that took three months. In 1884, a reconnaissance was made of the Copper River and explorations continued in the area of Valdez. The next year a party made an exploration trip up the Copper River and down the Tanana Valley with a side trip to Nulato and the Koyuk River before descending the Yukon to St. Michael to end the trip.

Meanwhile the gold rush had brought thousands of ill-equipped hopefuls to Alaska, and fears were raised as to actual and threatened lawlessness. In August 1897, two advance military men were sent by the Secretary of the Army to ascertain the conditions in Alaska and to determine whether troops would be required to maintain law and order.

Largely through their recommendations, the Army came back to Alaska, in force, in 1898, and again assumed many of the responsibilities of civil government.





*A soldier in his quarters at Fort Egbert, Alaska, 1900.*

Many of the names of early Army explorers have been immortalized in Alaskan place names. The community of Glennallen, the Glenn highway, and the Richardson highway are examples

Returning to Alaska during the gold rush, the Army established posts in southeast Alaska at Valdez and along the Yukon from St. Michael to Eagle City. By 1910, however, civil government had become established and the Alaskan garrison was reduced to less than a regiment. The Signal Corps had remained active and in 1902, men like Lieutenant William Mitchell crossed Alaska on foot, building its network of lines that were to become the Alaskan Communications System.

The development of this communications system drew the populated sections of the territory together and connected them to the continental United States. This may have been of greater and more lasting value to Alaska than all of the benefits derived from the discovery of gold.



*The air age buildup in Alaska proved the controversial points of this air power propagandist, the eagle who walked as a young man along the Yukon, the Air Corps general who was court-martialed because he was too right – Gen. Billy Mitchell.*



*Brig. General Wilde P. Richardson.*

Electronic communication was not the only successful enterprise of the Army in the beginning of the 20th century. Working out of Valdez, a party under Captain Abercrombie laid out and built the first major road in the territory—a military road from Valdez to Fairbanks, now known as the Richardson Highway.

The Alaska Railroad was authorized by Congress in 1914. The railroad was initially a Department of the Interior project, but its construction was under the supervision of Army Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Mears. Army Engineers laid out the railroad town which was to become Anchorage.



*Capt. (Brig. General) Wilde P. Richardson's headquarters at Eagle City, near Canadian border on the Yukon River in 1900.*



*Elmendorf Field, original site of Fort Richardson.*

World War I scarcely touched Alaska, but 2,223 Alaskans were drafted and an estimated 1,500 others went to the south 48 to enlist.

Between World War I and World War II, Army strength in Alaska declined. All Army posts but one in the territory were abandoned by 1925.

In 1939, increasing world tensions caused the establishment of Elmendorf Field just outside of Anchorage. One year later, the name Fort Richardson was adopted by the U.S. War Department in memory of Brigadier General Wilde P. Richardson, a Texas

engineer and 1884 West Point graduate who served three tours of duty in the rugged Alaska Territory between 1897 and 1917. During this time, General Richardson commanded troops along the Yukon, supervised construction of Fort Egbert near Eagle and Fort William H. Seward near Haines, and served as commander of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia. As head of the War Department's Alaska Road Commission during 1905–1917, he was responsible for much of the surveying and building of early railroads, roads and bridges that helped the state's settlement and growth. The Valdez-Fairbanks trail, surveyed under his direction in 1904, was named the Richardson Highway also in his memory.

Japanese aggression in the Aleutian Islands emphasized the strategic importance of Alaska. Fort Richardson's first mission was defense of southern Alaska by establishing a permanent air base, supply depot, and garrison. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, Fort Richardson was charged with defending Alaska from invasion and coordinating the Alaskan war effort. Before the outbreak of World War II, military strength in Alaska was less than 3,000; it soon grew to 7,800 troops stationed at Fort Richardson alone, including the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 81<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery, and 75<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery (Anti-Aircraft). As the war progressed, Fort Richardson's mission expanded significantly as the logistics base for numerous Army garrisons and the Air Corps.

Army activity in Alaska during World War II contributed greatly to the growth of the territory by the great influx of soldiers and civilian workers and the countless millions of dollars spent on construction. The highlight of this period was the building of the Alaska Highway. This epic task, performed by the Corps of Engineers, gave the territory its only overland link with the rest of the world.

After World War II, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) reduced military forces in Alaska. Fort Richardson and Fort Wainwright (known at that time as Ladd Army Airfield) were the only two DOD installations in Alaska not placed on housekeeping status. Nevertheless, Fort Richardson relinquished much of its training lands, with over 80,000 acres of training and maneuver lands, and over one million acres of bombing ranges being excessed. In ad-





*Firing the Nike Hercules Pilgrim at Site Summit, November 27, 1961.*

dition, approximately 13,000 acres was transferred to the Air Force (see Figure 2-4b).

Army troops were redesignated as the United States Army Alaska (USARAL) on November 15, 1947, and assigned to the Alaskan Command, the nation's first unified command staffed jointly by Army, Navy, and Air Force officers.

Headquarters for USARAL were established at Fort Richardson. At that time the post was located on what is now Elmendorf Air Force Base. After the establishment of the Air Force as a separate service in 1947, the Army post was rebuilt on its present location in 1950. The early 1950s saw an intensive building program designed to make the post more livable. More permanent barracks, family quarters, warehouses, a service club, underground utilities and a power plant were built. Also, the first streets were paved, the post was landscaped, the first of four school buildings sprang up and the gymnasium and theater were completed. It was the largest and most modern of Alaska's Army installations.



*Fort Richardson soldiers guard a devastated Anchorage.*

Three off-post Nike-Hercules missile sites were built in 1959. That December, one of the mighty missiles atop Site Summit (Mount Gordon Lyon) was test fired, marking the first time a Nike Hercules had been fired from an actual operational location. The missile unit was inactivated in July 1979, after more than 20 years of defending the skies over Anchorage.

By 1960, most of the fort's major facilities had been built, including a health and dental clinic, commissary, post exchange and officer and NCO clubs. In 1961, female soldiers were assigned to the post for the first time since World War II. Also that year, the United States Modern Biathlon Training Center was established at the fort. The facility, which trained military and civilian athletes in the Winter Olympic event that combines cross-country skiing and rifle marksmanship, was phased out in 1973.

When the Good Friday Earthquake struck on March 27, 1964, Fort Richardson's soldiers swung into action, performing rescue missions in Anchorage and throughout the state.

More than 1000 soldiers were in the Anchorage area within two days, supplying food, water, communication and medical supplies to the injured and homeless. The post became the focal point of rescue operations for the state for almost three weeks. For some outlying communities, Fort Richardson was the only link to the outside.

The post itself suffered an estimated \$17 million in damages, minor compared to that of other areas. However, the Skyline Military Service Club was nearly destroyed and one man was killed when a section of the building collapsed.

In 1969 and again in 1971, Fort Richardson was presented the Secretary of Defense Citation of Meritorious Achievement in support of the Natural Resources Conservation Program. Also in 1969, the post received the "Conservation Organization of the Year" award from the Secretary of the State of Alaska, who commended the post for outstanding achievements in wildlife conservation education and its active scientific research and management of game. That commitment to wildlife enhancement continues today and many species, including moose, bear, fox and eagle, are permanent or transient residents.

In December 1974, as part of worldwide realignments, USARAL was inactivated and the post became headquarters for the 172nd Infantry Brigade (Alaska) in January 1975. As in previous years, subordinate posts were maintained at Fort Wainwright, near Fairbanks, and Fort Greely, near Delta Junction.

In a subsequent realignment in March 1986, the 172nd gave way to the 6th Infantry Division (Light) and United States Army Garrison, Alaska. This marked a new mission for the Army in Alaska as a light, deployable force capable of defending United States interests across the globe. The division became aligned more closely with the Defense

Department's forces in the Pacific when, in 1989, it began reporting to the U.S. Army Western Command in Hawaii (later redesignated United States Army Pacific).

In 1990, headquarters for the 6th was moved to Fort Wainwright. In 1993, as part of Army-wide downsizing, the 6th was selected to be reorganized as a light infantry brigade.

The 6th Infantry Division (Light) was inactivated July 1994, and Fort Richardson became headquarters for United States Army Alaska (USARAK).